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ABSTRACT

A librarian describes library services available for physically impaired students at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. Following background information on the university's commitment to disabled students, a discussion is presented on the effects of federal legislation on changes in library facilities; collections; and services for disabled persons, including special equipment and materials for those who cannot use conventional printed materials. Cooperation with other university offices serving disabled students is stressed. A training program to orient visually impaired students and their readers and hearing impaired students and their interpreters is reviewed. The librarian's role in promoting awareness of disabled library users is stressed, and an orientation program on communication is cited as an example. The importance of publicizing special library services is also noted. (CL)

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Library Services for the Physically Impaired at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois

Samuel T. Huang

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to be here today to talk to you about Library Services for the Physically Impaired at Northern Illinois University in De Kalb, Illinois. De Kalb is seventy miles directly west of Chicago. Perhaps most of you do not know our institution by name. Northern Illinois University does not have an outstanding sports team, either in basketball or football. If you are a sports fan, you certainly would not have heard our name from the mass media. But if you are interested in special education training programs, you may know of us. Northern Illinois University is one of the largest major universities in the nation to provide teacher training programs in special education. At present, the University offers B.S., M.S., Ph.D. and ED.D. degrees in Education with a major in Special Education. In addition, the Library School at Northern also offers library training in service to the disabled.

Northern Illinois University is a state institution that was established in 1895 by an act of the Illinois General Assembly.

Paper presented at the Conference on Academic Library Services to Disabled Students (Tallahassee, FL, May 6-7, 1983)

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It is centrally located in northern Illinois and serves as a principal cultural and educational center for that growing region. Above all, Northern Illinois University has become known as a major research and training site for teachers serving the blind and visually and hearing impaired. This attracts many students with disabilities to the University. Several blind students from Africa and Asia are enrolled in our university for this particular training program.

Library Services specifically designed for the disabled are of relatively recent origin, and access by the disabled to all libraries, library resources and library services has only recently become a concern to most public and academic libraries. This new positive attitude was stimulated by the militant civil rights political demands of the disabled community. Laws such as the 1969 "Elimination of Architectural Barriers to the Physically Handicappekd Act" (PL 90-480), the 1973 "Rehabilitation Act" (PL 93-112), the 1975 "Education for All Handicapped Children Act" (PL 94-142) and issuance in May, 1977 of the Regulations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protect the disabled individual's right to benefit equally from programs and services in public or private institutions of higher education nationally.(1) An increase in the number of disabled persons entering universities and a growing recognition of the need to provide assistance to select groups of users have influenced changes in library facilities, collections and services for

disabled individuals in general. These laws and regulations have had a great impact on library services for the disabled.

In the early and mid-1970's, Northern Illinois University received federal funds and made significant efforts to comply with the regulations by adapting university buildings and landscaping to facilitate accessibility on campus. Academic programs were modified to assure equality in the delivery of student services. Northern Illinois University's Library Services for the Physically Impaired was integrated into the overall plan in 1977 when the main library was moved to its present new building. At that time, there were only six legally blind students, three blind students and thirteen hearing impaired students on the campus. Elimination of architectural and physical barriers to disabled library users was carefully considered to meet the American National Standards Institute's specifications for making facilities accessible to and usable by physically handicapped people. Although accessibility was greatly increased, the Northern Illinois University campus does not have many students with other types of disabilities, probably due mainly to the often severe winter weather conditions. Thus, Library Services for the Physically Impaired has focused mainly on these two special disabilities, visually and hearing impaired. At present there are 36 legally blind, 4 totally blind and 42 hearing impaired students on the campus, a small percentage of the student population which now numbers approximately 22,000.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that they are an important user group for any library to serve. This user group requires not only traditional directional and informational assistance, but it also frequently requires physical assistance. Because Northern Illinois University is a state institution, it cannot exclude disabled citizens or their readers or interpreters. An additional 145 disabled persons from the local area have been identified and need to be served.

Northern Illinois University's reading room for the physically impaired students is open approximately 114 hours a week during the school year.

Sunday	1:30 PM - 2:00 AM
Monday - Thursday	7:30 AM - 2:00 AM
Friday	7:30 AM - 10:00 PM
Saturday	9:00 AM - 10:00 PM

The reading room houses a large collection of specially designed equipment, reference materials in braille, large print or recorded editions and a resources file dealing with different disabilities. Special equipment and materials are available for those who cannot use conventional printed materials. The following list represents the equipment that is currently available for library users.

Equipment	Quantity
Perkins Brailler	3
Braille Clock	1
Varispeech II (Speech time compressor or expander)	2
Large Type Typewriter (Manual)	1
IBM Selectric Typewriter	1
Portable Cassette Tape Recorder/Player	3
Reel to Reel Tape Recorder	1
Talking Book Machine	2
Visualtek (with Typing Aid System and Microviewer)	3
Optacon	1
Kurzweil Reading Machine	1
Special Magnifier	2
Talking Calculator	1
Talking World Books Encyclopedia and Reading Machine	1

Some of the items mentioned above were not included in James Thomas's Academic Library Facilities and Services for the Handicapped.(2) Since the publication of that list in 1981,

several new items have been acquired to provide better service. It is my opinion that an academic library needs not only to provide equipment and visual aids of this nature, but also to determine what types of equipment are being used and how often they are used. For example, at present, almost every student has his/her own talking calculator. Thus, there is no need for us to purchase additional calculators.

Blind readers and partially sighted readers have different needs in terms of both services and equipment. Most of our visually impaired library users are the partially sighted who are not particularly interested in the Kurzweil Reading Machine or the Optacon. But they are vital machines to the blind students. At present, the cost of these machines is beyond the budget of most libraries. Without careful and thorough research of users' needs before purchasing any equipment, great effort and money may be expended in vain. Due to the financial crisis at Northern Illinois University, Library Services for the Physically Impaired has received zero funding for the acquisition of any visual aid equipment for the past several years. This lack of funding foced us to seek outside financial aid. It then became my responsibility to engage in fund raising activities and in promoting this unique service to the citizens of the community.

In addition to Library Services for the Physically Impaired, Northern Illinois University has a Services for Handicapped Students Office, a Career Planning and Placement Office and

an Office of the Illinois Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. It also has several professors engaged in training and developing research programs to assist disabled students. The Librarian for Service of the Physically Impaired frequently works as a coordinator to conduct all referral services and to maintain a close relationship with the various offices involved. Northern Illinois University's Services to Handicapped Students Office plays an important role in assisting individual visually impaired students in ordering textbooks in adapted media, transcribing various materials into braille, locating classes to facilitate accessibility for the physically disabled, etc. I would like to emphasize several of the valuable services provided by this office such as priority mail registration, student housing, adaptation of examinations and/or handouts, development of auditory, braille and tactile campus maps, orientation to campus, aid with finding paid and/or volunteer readers and typists, assistance with transportation needs and so on.

Each semester, the Library Services for the Physically Impaired offers two sessions of library bibliographical instruction and orientation. One session is organized for the visually impaired students and the readers; the other is for the hearing impaired students and their interpreters. Portions of the latter are conducted in American Sign Language (ASL). These sessions have proven to be very meaningful and useful to everyone involved. Not only does it help me and my colleagues in providing service

to this special user group, it also provides me with an opportunity to learn what each individual user's needs are. Library instruction includes two major categories: 1) basic library information such as where and how to look for assistance and library materials; 2) the purpose and operation of each piece of equipment in the reading room. The second session sometimes involves a much longer period of training time. It is my personal view that it is most beneficial to conduct a workshop for the user group and to extend invitation to the library staff and whoever else may be interested. This also provides the library staff with an opportunity to interact with our disabled library users. I would like to suggest that it is always helpful to train a second library staff member as a back-up person. For instance, Northern Illinois University Library gegan its instructional program on operating the Kurzweil Reading Machine in January. It took many, many hours of this librarian's time to teach the operation of this reading machine and finding the time to complete this training program which usually takes ten to twelve hours was not an easy task. Too often there was a conflict between the times when I was free to train and the times when the students, who usually have their classes and readers scheduled at the beginning of each semester, were free. The longer the interval between training sessions, the longer it takes to complete the training since most students tend to forget the previous lesson. A back-up person would have been most useful in assisting with the training program in that we could

have been more flexible in scheduling and I as the primary trainer would have had more time for other projects.

Northern Illinois University Library is actively collecting and updating information concerning services available to the physically impaired from local, state and federal agencies. Also, it is the library's policy to collect and subscribe to organizational newsletters which concern the physically impaired. Without administrative support, financing is always a major problem in achieving our goals. Our financial support for this special service currently is almost entirely dependent on private interest and support.

Although the literature of librarianship contains much writing on the architectural and physical barriers encountered by disabled persons, attitudinal barriers in libraries and their elimination have been treated less fully. I feel strongly that it is the responsibility of librarians to promote this awareness to any library staff members who have direct or indirect contact with disabled library users. Each month, the Service for the Handicapped Students Office and the Library Services for the Physically Impaired at Northern Illinois University jointly conduct a meeting with disabled students to discuss their needs. As the Librarian for Services of the Physically Impaired, I participate as frequently as possible in order to obtain information for improving our library services. When time or the

situation permits, I also invite some of my library colleagues to attend these meetings. Familiarity through interaction with this particular user group serves to dispel a tendency toward apprehension and fear in communication. I once heard a story from one of my colleagues about a blind student seeking assistance at the information desk. The librarian was panic-stricken: "A blind student needs help! What shall I do?" He began looking for me even before asking what it was the student wanted. Therefore, I feel that it is my duty to increase the awareness of our library staff to the needs of this specialized clientele.

It is helpful to inform the library staff on how to communicate with disabled persons in general. To accomplish this, one might consider organizing a workshop or orientation session on library service for disabled patrons. Northern Illinois University regularly conducts this type of workshop to address various issues involving disabilities. In 1982, our Library Staff Development Committee conducted a survey on the needs of the library staff. A major area of interest turned out to be communicating with visually and hearing impaired students who use the library. Since then, the Library Services for the Physically Impaired has jointly organized workshops of this nature with various departments on campus. Library staff participating in these workshops experience a greater sensitivity toward and understanding of disabled people's needs. The feedback from

these workshops was very encouraging. To help librarians develop positive social attitudes toward the disabled is a rewarding experience.

Once I am aware of a new visual aid, a hearing device or other equipment for the physically impaired that is being introduced on the market, I promptly contact the sales representative to arrange demonstrations for our library staff, students, disabled citizens and local charity organizations in the community. The more one introduces these new technologies to disabled library users, library staff and the public, the more understanding and interaction develop among the staff and patrons. These kinds of informal gatherings and workshops receive a positive response from all those involved. Recently the University of California at Berkeley conducted a workshop of the same nature.(3) The responses they received were also very satisfying. In Ruth Velleman's book Serving Physically Disabled People, she states: "The elimination of barriers so that disabled people may live among the able-bodied in dignity and equality will count for nothing unless the first and most important barrier of all--prejudice--is eliminated. We, as librarians, in order to give service to all segments of society, must look within ourselves to deal with our attitudes toward all patrons so that we may give service with the necessary care and sensitivity."(4)

As Librarian for Services to the Physically Impaired, I am a member of the Northern Illinois Radio Information Service (NIRIS) Advisory Council. Northern Illinois Radio Information Service is also located on the Northern Illinois University campus and its primary listening area covers a large area with a twenty-five mile radius of DeKalb. Northern Illinois Radio Information Service is affiliated with radio station WNIU-FM, the local Public Broadcasting System outlet. It is aimed at the blind and print-handicapped people who have a physical disability which prevents them from reading conventional printed materials such as books and newspapers. Programming includes the reading of daily and weekly newspapers from all over Northern Illinois. Reading is done by volunteers. These volunteers include librarians, professors, students and citizens of the community. Other programs include the reading of books, novels, short stories and specialized consumer information. Northern Illinois Radio Information Service provides the library with the opportunity to disseminate information at no cost regarding library services and activities, particularly those of interest to readers with visual and physical disabilities. I feel it is vital to publicize any library services which meet the needs of its disabled users. Another source of publicity for the library's special services is a poster which was designed to publicize the unique services and equipment that are available in the library for this special user group. The poster has been posted in residence halls, on public bulletin boards, on other buildings on campus, as well as in

the public library and retirement centers in the community. Any person who can benefit from our services and facilities is welcome!

Northern Illinois University's Library Services for the Physically Impaired publishes a quarterly newsletter entitled "LSPI News," which provides up-to-date information regarding special services available for the disabled library user. It also includes lists of new books, information on recently acquired devices and aids and recent research of interest to disabled persons. I have brought copies of some recent issues with me if anyone is interested in reading them. I would be happy to add the names of those of you who are interested to our mailing list if you will just give me the necessary information. I would also welcome your suggestions and comments on this publication. Also, the library has recently published a directory of information relating to the library services at Northern Illinois University in braille. This is one of the first library directories in a braille edition. It has become a permanent item at LOEX /Library Orientation/Instruction Exchange (library network)/ maintained by the National Clearinghouse for Academic Library Use in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Thank you.

NOTES

(1) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Briefing Guide. Washington, D.C., Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services, March, 1981.

(2) Thomas, James L. and Thomas, Carol H., ed. Academic Library Facilities and Services for the Handicapped. Phoenix, Arizona, Oryx Press, 1981.

(3) Pomerantz, Peter. "The Library Service to Users with Disabilities: A Workshop." Reference and Selection News (General Library, University of California at Berkeley), no. 27, April 14, 1983.

(4) Velleman, Ruth A. Serving Physically Disabled People: An Information Handbook for All Libraries. New York, R. R. Bowker Co., 1979.